



**"Refuse collection is one of the most hazardous jobs in the country."
Bureau of Labor Statistics - 1999**

Refuse collection workers face a variety of occupational hazards. In fact, refuse collection was identified as one of the most dangerous jobs in the United States. Refuse collecting and recycling accounted for over 1% of all occupational fatalities nationally between 1992 and 1997. While occupational workers "struck by" vehicles account for a major portion of these fatalities, other workers are killed by contact with objects and equipment according to Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) 2001 data.

On the average, there is one fatal injury each and every day, caused by a vehicle striking a worker. (2003 U.S. Department of Labor)

Statistically, refuse collection ranks third among dangerous jobs in the United States, behind fishing and timber cutting, according to a 2000 study of workers' compensation claims by the University of Miami and the Florida Center for Solid and Hazardous Waste Management. The study indicates that the high number of deaths can be attributed partly to impatient drivers who try to pass stopped garbage collection vehicles and end up hitting collectors. The study's findings place waste handling as a riskier occupation than being an airplane pilot or a taxi driver. According to the study's authors, the mortality rate for a refuse collector is 100 times higher than what is considered acceptable risk by any standard. The study notes that the injury rate is also high. Collectors, on average, are injured five to seven times more than the average worker, with 52.7 injuries per 100 workers. Most of those are back injuries and lacerations.

According to BLS, the fatality rate for refuse collectors for that five-year period was 10 times the overall on-the-job fatality rate, averaging 46 deaths per 100,000 workers per year. The fatality rate for all occupations was 4.7 deaths per 100,000 workers. Vehicles inflicted the most deaths on refuse collectors. The BLS statistics also reflect a high number of nonfatal injuries and illnesses for refuse collection, mostly caused by overexertion and by being struck, striking against, or being compressed in equipment.

While the above information specifically references the refuse collection industry, many other industries share similar safety concerns and issues. Industries such as the postal/delivery service industries; utility and public service operations and the public transportation industry all have workers in or near the road way. With all parties working together, we can improve this high-risk work environment for both workers and the general public.

What can be done to reduce the risk of injuries and fatalities of workers who perform services in the public road way? First, increase awareness of the general public to this issue, utilizing programs such as "Slow Down to Get Around". Second, consider creating laws that regulate safe vehicle operation around public service vehicles, such as those regulations already in place for stopped emergency/police vehicles or school buses.



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Waste Management Worker Hit/Killed in Accident

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The Eaton County Sheriff's Department is investigating a deadly accident involving a Waste Management worker. The 44 year old was struck by a vehicle while collecting trash Monday. It happened on Royston Road south of M-50 in Eaton Township.

The driver was a 19-year-old Charlotte resident. The driver was at the scene when police arrived. The accident is under investigation and a statement from Waste Management is expected to be released soon.



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Campaign to Protect Local Workers

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A new campaign is hoping to keep public service workers out of the path of danger. It's called "slow down to get around," signs meant to remind us of the dangers construction workers face on our highways every day.

Carol Ely: "What we don't see are the people working on and around these vehicles."

Now a new ad campaign is educating drivers about the dangers public service workers also face. Carol Ely knows all too well. Her husband worked as a trash collector for more than 20-years. She says because he knew the hazards, safety was always a priority.

Carol Ely: "He was very aware of the fact he needed to be safe, he wanted to come home to us."

One day, about four months ago, Eric didn't come home. A driver hit and killed him while he was working.

Carol Ely: "Shock, disbelief, not understanding why, lots of things go through your mind."

In hopes of preventing more tragedy, Carol Ely helped mid-Michigan business leaders and city officials kick off the "slow down to get around campaign." It has simple goals- get drivers to slow down and pay more attention when they're driving by public service workers or vehicles.

Carol Ely: "You're in such a hurry, you want to get to where you want to go, and don't realize there's a person with that vehicle that's trying to do their job, trying to make a living for their family and wants to go home to that family."

The campaign is about saving lives, and Ely says even if the campaign saves one life, all their efforts will be worth it.

Carol Ely: "Spare other people from going through the same thing that me and my family are going through."

The campaign is using billboards and public service announcements to get their message out. Campaign officials also say they're trying to get firmer laws for driving around public service vehicles, similar to regulations that already exist for emergency vehicles or school buses.



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